

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02

OPIC-03 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 PC-01 /091 W

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R 181415Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2416

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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LONDON FOR HAVERKAMP

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, KE

SUBJECT: GENERAL STRIKE THREATENED IN KENYA

SUMMARY: KENYAN LABOR, WHICH HAS BEEN QUIESCENT FOR MONTHS UNDER THE TWIN RESTRAINTS OF PRESIDENTIAL STRIKE BAN AND DIVISIVE STRUGGLE FOR POWER WITHIN NATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION, HAS RECENTLY SHOWN SIGNS OF HEIGHTENED MILITANCY. WHILE LABOR LEADERS APPEAR DETERMINED TO DEFY STRIKE BAN AND PRESS AHEAD WITH CALL FOR GENERAL STRIKE SHOULD GOK NOT BE RESPONSIVE TO ITS TOUGHPGWAGE DEMANDS, KENYA'S PAST EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS ELEVENTH HOUR SETTLEMENT MAY BE REACHED AND ACTUAL WORK STOPPAGE AVERTED. END SUMMARY

1. KENYA'S CENTRAL ORGANIZATION OF TRADE UNIONS (COTU), THE UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION WHICH ENCOMPASSES 33 OF 35 NATIONAL TRADE UNION, HAS THREATENED NATION-WIDE WORK STOPPAGE IF GOVERNMENT

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DOES NOT AGREE TO LARGE WAGE INCREASES FOR KENYA'S HALF-MILLION UNIONIZED WORKERS. THE THREAT, WHICH WAS DELIVERED IN EARLY APRIL BY COTU'S ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL JUMA BOY, CITED THE DEVASTATING EFFECT DOUBLE-DIGIT INFLATION HAS HAD ON WORKERS' CHECKS AND SHARPLY CRITICIZED GOK'S ALLEGED OPPOSITION TO COMPENSATORY WAGE HIKE.

2. SPECIFICALLY, COTU IS DEMANDING:

A) INCREASE IN MONTHLY MINIMUM WAGE FROM 240 SHILLINGS (\$34) TO 400 SHILLINGS (\$56) FOR ALL NON-FARM WORKERS,
B) 15-20 PERCENT WAGE HIKE AS COMPENSATION FOR PAST INFLATION,
C) INCLUSION OF COST OF LIVING CLAUSES IN NEW CONTRACTS,
D) SUSPENSION OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT WAGE GUIDELINES WHICH LIMIT INCREASES IN NEW CONTRACTS TO 50 SHILLINGS PER MONTH. ONLY GOK RESPONSE TO DATE IS DECISION TO RAISE MINIMUM WAGE TO 290 SHILLINGS. (COMMENT: SINCE ONLY ESTIMATED 5 PERCENT OF COTU WORKERS CURRENTLY AT MINIMUM WAGE THIS CONCESSION BY ITSELF UNLIKELY TO FORESTALL STRIKE.)

3. FOLLOWING AN UNSUCCESSFUL APRIL 9 MEETING (CHARACTERIZED BY VETERAN TRADE UNION OFFICIAL AS QTE STORMIEST IN TEN YEARS UNQTE) IN WHICH MINISTER OF LABOR NYAMWEYA ISSUED STRONG WARNING AGAINST PROPOSED STRIKE, JUMA BOY RECEIVED UNANIMOUS BACKING FOR HIS STAND FROM LEADERS OF COTU'S MEMBER UNIONS. IN PAST WEEK POSITIONS OF BOTH GOVERNMENT AND LABOR APPEAR TO HAVE HARD-

ENED AND STAGE NOW SET FOR FORMAL STRIKE CALL AT SCHEDULED APRIL 19 MEETING OF COTU'S GOVERNING COUNCIL. ASSISTANT SEC. GEN. MULEI TOLD EMBOFF APRIL 17 THAT VOTE TO STRIKE VIRTUALLY CERTAIN, ADDING THAT ANY UNION OFFICIAL WHO VOTED AGAINST STRIKE PROPOSAL WOULD BE UNSEATED BY ANGRY AND DETERMINED RANK AND FILE. ACTUAL DATE OF WORK STOPPAGE, IF CALLED, WILL BE DETERMINED APRIL 19.

4. IN THREATENING GENERAL STRIKE JUMA BOY HAS CHALLENGED PRESIDENTIAL BAN ON ALL STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH HAS BEEN IN EFFECT SINCE LAST AUGUST. IN RECENT CONVERSATION, JUMA BOY TOLD EMBOFF HE BELIEVES STRIKE BAN BOTH ILLEGAL AND UNENFORCEABLE AND IS QTE WILLING TO GO TO JAIL TO PROVE IT UNQTE. PRESENT MOOD OF OTHER COTU OFFICIALS SIMILARLY MILITANT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITH BLUNT TALK OF LABOR CAPITALIZING ON ALLEGED GOK WEAKNESS IN AFTERMATH OF MARCH SLAYING OF POPULAR ANTI-GOK CRITIC J.M. KARIUKI.

5. GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO ALLOW LABOR TO HOLD DEMONSTRATION IN NAIROBI ON APRIL 27 TO PROTEST MURDER OF KARIUKI HAS GENERATED ADDITIONAL UNHAPPINESS AT COTU. ACCORDING TO JUMA BOY, WHO REPRESENTS COASTAL CONSTITUANCY IN PARLIAMENT AND WAS ONE OF

KARIUKI'S STAUNCHEST POLITICAL ALLIES, GOK DECISION ON DEMONSTRATION HAS ENRAGED RANK AND FILE AND INCREASED PRESSURE FOR STRIKE.

6. COMMENT: HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONISM IN KENYA IS REplete WITH EXAMPLES OF EMPTY STRIKE THREATS. SOME VETERAN OBSERVERS CONTEND THAT A REASONABLY GRACEFUL ACCOMMODATION WILL BE FOUND IN CURRENT DISPUTE. ALTHOUGH GOK HAS ALWAYS REACTED STRONGLY TO STRIKE CALLS IN THE PAST IT MAY DECIDE IT WOULD BE ILL- ADVISED TO CONFRONT LABOR IN PRESENT UNSETTLED PERIOD AND WILL OPT FOR CONCILIATORY APPROACH.
MARSHALL

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